

A Vision for a New Business Automation Model for Consumer Services in the Virginia Social Services System

Draft: 1/27/06

Introduction

Low-income and vulnerable Virginians face critical challenges to their health, safety, and economic well-being. In its [strategic plan](#), the Virginia Social Services System (VSSS) envisions a Commonwealth in which individuals and families have access to adequate, affordable, high-quality human/social services that enable them to be the best they can. The challenges to making this vision a reality are numerous: increasing poverty, decreasing resources, a graying workforce, an environment of continual federal and state legislative change, and outdated and inefficient business practices. Although our system performs well in many respects, we can be better – better for consumers of our services, better for those working at local departments of social services and community action agencies, better for State Department of Social Service staff, and better for the taxpayers of Virginia. Given these challenges, the risk of maintaining the status quo is far too great. We must change to keep apace with our increasing caseloads and the changing characteristics and circumstances of our consumers, and to achieve the goals of our Strategic Plan.

The following paper describes a service model which can enable our system to meet our current challenges and achieve our vision. This vision is a product of ongoing dialogue, careful analysis, and comprehensive research stemming from many sources: the VSSS Strategic Plan, the Goal Three initiatives for improved productivity through automation and an Integrated Social Services Delivery System (ISSDS), the Business Process Reengineering (BPR) initiative, local agency written responses on vendor proposals, the IT Customer Satisfaction Survey, discussions with federal partners, the recent JLARC reports on the social services system and on self-sufficiency, and ongoing discussion through various VLSSE, BPRO, VASWP and ITIM committees. This vision is consistent with the Change Management and BPR initiatives, and will be used to guide the ISSDS project and other automation tasks under the direction of the Steering Committee for VSSS Strategic Plan Goal Three.

Front Door to No Wrong Door

In the envisioned new business automation model, consumers can seek assistance and manage their ongoing business from the VSSS by phone, via the Internet, or in-person at local departments of social services, community action agencies, child support office or any partner organizations. Workers, family members, and volunteers can also use this same system to assist prospective or existing consumers and to enter cases into a system which will maintain a single case record used by multiple programs. Hallmarks of this system include:

- ▶ Single, on-line point of access to all Virginia social service programs available 24/7, 365 days per year. Constant access is essential as the majority of adult recipients in the social service system are working.
- ▶ Allows consumers or their authorized representatives to screen, apply, renew, view benefit summary, report changes and update demographic information, and check status of their transactions. Applications and renewals can be e-signed.
- ▶ A single application for multiple services that is dynamic, bringing forth only applicable questions based on applicants' previous responses.
- ▶ During the application process, external databases are searched to bring forth information known to the system to be used for verification purposes. Applicants have the ability to accept or reject these external sources of verification and are instructed what additional verifications are required and how to submit them.
- ▶ Applications are routed directly to the appropriate agency and data automatically populates the appropriate system, avoiding duplicate data entry.
- ▶ Community partners have the ability to screen, apply, and e-sign for their consumers; assist with the verification process; and check the status of applications. Partners will be certified at various levels (gold, silver, bronze), granting different levels system access and functionality.

- ▶ Scanned verification documents can be uploaded to the system and attached to the applicant/consumer record and made available, as appropriate, for eligibility determination and ongoing case maintenance.
- ▶ All consumer information will be entered in a consistent format and consumer data maintained in a single record accessed and updated by multiple programs. Access to data elements will be restricted as appropriate according to federal and state laws.
- ▶ Report cards – consumers, LDSS staff, and partner organizations will be able to search for service providers and view their performance including child care providers, adult living facilities, and education and training providers.

Beyond the No Wrong Doors – Streamlining Business Automation Processes

Social services are provided by a mix of federal, state, and local government, faith-based, not-for-profit, and for-profit organizations. Each community has unique needs and varying capacities to provide necessary services and benefits to its residents. Amid the swirl of demands and partner organizations, local departments of social services maintain legal responsibility for critical services including child and adult protective services, foster care, and eligibility for safety net programs. To help these different organizations work together as a system, maximize available resources, and effectively serve consumers, the business automation processes of the social services system need to change.

As discussed above, the request for assistance and application process can be more consumer driven and partner mediated. Additionally, the provision of services needs to be provided by the most appropriate and qualified service providers available, and the LDSS need not be the lead agency to provide and broker services for each consumer. In the new business automation model, regardless of the point of entry, each request for assistance will be evaluated through a more comprehensive up-front screening and assessment process and a team of LDSS and community partner representatives will then be assigned to provide and manage the appropriate services.

Since Virginia social services are state supervised, locally administered, and involve many other partnerships, effective change requires input and coordination across a broad spectrum of organizations with different perspectives. Strong participation by knowledgeable local staff and community partners who can both represent and help lead the process is crucial. A strong governance process that includes representatives of key stakeholders will be set up in order to ensure successful and effective change.

In order to take full advantage of the strengths of these different organizations and increase efficiency of local departments of social services, the following tools will be implemented:

- ▶ Web services for client data – local departments of social services, other state agencies, and subscribing partner organizations will be able to access client-level data through a web service. Access to data will be restricted, as appropriate, according to federal and state laws.
- ▶ Improved automated processes – improved ease of use, simpler navigation, similar look and feel across information systems, and streamlined automation and system work flows based on BPR results will be implemented across all automated processes.
- ▶ Report portal – all reports will be available through a single report portal which can be configured by each user based on their needs.
- ▶ Single sign-on – users will have access, as appropriate, to all required systems using a single sign-on (LDAP).
- ▶ Common front-end and consumer record – LDSS and partner agency staff will use a common front-end to enter demographic information, verification information, view existing information about applicants/consumers, and complete up-front screenings and assessments. External data sources will be searched to pre-populate these fields and report on current utilization of services. This information will be stored in a single consumer record and made available across programs, as appropriate according to federal and state laws. Demographic and verification information will automatically populate disparate systems. Any update to the demographic and verification information by the client (through call centers or over the Internet) or to a worker will update the common consumer record. The common consumer

record shall also have a case notes function and update the data warehouse for research, planning, and reporting purposes.

- ▶ Eligibility determination function – all programs including child care, Medicaid ABD and LTC, IV-E, and Auxiliary Grants will have a system available to assist workers in determining eligibility and perform important case maintenance activities including client notices, automatic recalculation of benefits based on mass changes, and case-specific communication to workers.
- ▶ Enterprise case management function – used across programs by LDSS and partner agencies, this system will track providers, services provided, case-based financial management, maintain service plans, maintain case notes, offer alerts to workers, and enable data standardized data exchange with companion systems.
- ▶ Electronic case files – all case files for the social services system will be electronic and file information will be made available, as appropriate, to various program staff at local departments of social services and partner organizations. All case information will either be generated and saved electronically or scanned and saved electronically.
- ▶ Customer service center(s) – local or regional customer service centers operating extended hours will be available to take applications, interim reports, and changes over the phone; as well as provide other customer services including referral to other available services and service providers.
- ▶ Online system documentation – searchable user manuals and screen-level help systems will be provided for each automated system to provide detailed and up-to-date instructions and explanations.

Benefits of the New Consumer Services Business Automation Model

To Consumers:

- ▶ Increased access to services
- ▶ Reduced demand to secure transportation
- ▶ Ability to inquire about the status of their transactions with the system
- ▶ Better information to facilitate consumer-directed service planning and provision
- ▶ More appropriate and timely service provision
- ▶ Reduced reporting demands

To Local Staff:

- ▶ Decrease in data entry
- ▶ Decrease in time spent signing on to multiple systems
- ▶ Decrease time spent inquiring external systems for verification information
- ▶ Decrease time spent searching for appropriate reports
- ▶ Easier to use systems with improved documentation and training
- ▶ Reduction in errors from illegible forms, incorrect form responses, and incomplete forms
- ▶ More comprehensive view of consumers and their families
- ▶ Easy access to case information
- ▶ Greater sharing of intake, case management, and service provision with community partners

To Executives:

- ▶ Decreased administrative costs
- ▶ Increased audit capabilities
- ▶ Decreased time spent searching for or creating performance and management reports
- ▶ Access to VSSS client data within VDSS information systems
- ▶ Enterprise automation that takes into account locality and partner needs
- ▶ Improved consumer participation in targeted programs (e.g., children's health, Food Stamps)
- ▶ More flexibility in allocating work by eliminating the necessary link between workers and cases
- ▶ Better access to service level and financial data for the purposes of policy development and information sharing with the General Assembly and other key stakeholders so that our system can continue improving its outcomes for serving low-income, vulnerable individuals and families.